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ABSTRACT

This monograph examines sociological perspectives and their applications. It is intended to help the college student coming to sociology for the first time to recognize that there are several perspectives within sociology and to disentangle the mass of terms associated with each. The first distinctive sociological perspective came from the work of Augustus Comte, who coined the word sociology from the Latin "socius" and the Greek "logos" in 1837. Comte's positivism, rather than examining the way individuals perceive the social world around them, assumes that society is an objective thing, "out there," waiting to be examined, analysed, and understood like the natural world. The functionalist perspective is rooted in the work of Emile Durkheim. Functionalism views society as an organism in which all the parts function in a way that ensures the continued well-being of the whole organism. The foundations of functionalism were built upon by later writers including Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Parsons, and Merton. A conflict perspective offers us a view of society split into essentially two groups, aggregates, or classes whose interest conflict. The real foundations of the conflict theory are in the works of Marx and Engels. Other contributors include Weber and Dahrendorf. The monograph then turns to a discussion of phenomenology. Phenomenological approaches in sociology may be viewed in terms of a reaction against one of the major characteristics of traditional "mainstream" sociology. The sociological perspective known as symbolic interactionism is concerned primarily with the way that man interacts with his symbolic rather than his physical universe. The publication concludes with the statement that each perspective offers insights which illuminate each problem to some degree but, as yet, no one form of theorizing has overtaken all the others. (Author/RM)

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SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Charles Townley and Mike Middleton

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1. Sociology and the Social Sciences

A problem facing all students who come to study a discipline for the first time is that they must do two things simultaneously. They must familiarise themselves with the substance or content of their new subject and, at the same time, they must learn the methodology of the subject. That is, they must become familiar not only with the knowledge and research findings which fill the textbooks but also with the methods by which the knowledge is obtained and organised, i.e. with the logical basis of the subject itself.

These two elements are not separate; they are very closely related. The way social scientists organise their discipline, that is, the way they look at the social world they are studying and the concepts they use to analyse and describe it, will determine the way the textbooks are written and the way the knowledge is presented.

Because we are all familiar with social life through our everyday experiences we may feel that the social sciences are very largely a matter of common-sense. But, as a look at any textbook will quickly indicate, though each of the social sciences is concerned with man in society, each discipline goes beyond common-sense understandings. Each discipline focuses on a particular aspect of social life, each uses particular methods of study and each employs its own set of concepts. It is this set of concepts, the most basic ideas in a subject, which constitute the 'logical basis of the subject', which enables the social scientist to go beyond everyday common-sense understandings and which distinguishes one discipline from another. "The sociologist does not look at phenomena that nobody else is aware of. But he looks at the same phenomena in a different way."(1) His way of looking is his perspective.

In building a house, for example, each craftsman concentrates upon one particular aspect of the building. Each uses his own particular methods and employs his own tools. So we are unlikely to find a bricklayer fitting electric cables with a plumbers wrench! So, too, in the social sciences, each discipline develops its own conceptual tools and its own perspective — its own way of looking at things. This perspective, in turn, determines the topics which each discipline investigates, the kinds of questions it asks and, thus, the conclusions it reaches.

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The economist focuses upon the production and distribution of wealth, often using quantitative methods and employing concepts such as supply, demand, scarcity, production, distribution and costs. The psychologist focuses his study upon the individual, sometimes employing experimental methods, and using concepts like needs, drives, motivation, personality, traits, intelligence. The psychiatrist is concerned with disturbed individuals, works through case studies and uses concepts like neurosis, psychosis, obsession, transference and therapy. Political scientists traditionally focus upon government, using quantitative methods and the concepts power, elite, pluralism, parties and pressure groups. Anthropology comes closest to sociology in many respects, studying the culture of whole, often small-scale 'primitive', societies through ethnographic field studies and concepts such as culture, customs, rituals, institutions and values. In addition to sociology which we shall look at in more detail below, we might also include social history and geography in our list.

If we take football as an example we can see that each discipline has its own perspective, distinctive from every other in some way, and also different from that of the newspaper sports pages. A historian might put it in the context of how ball games developed in a society, where they originated and under what conditions they came to be implamented. A geographer might be interested in where it is played and under what climatic or economic conditions, or how leisure and sports facilities fit into a pattern of land use. An anthropologist would be interested in rituals, customs and beliefs and how they fit into the whole social system. Frankenberg, an anthropologist studying a Welsh village, showed how football had a cohesive function and brought people in that village together through committees, meetings, matches and other activities. A psychologist might well be interested in the personality characteristics associated with success in football so Professor Cohen compared Bobby Charlton's aspirations and achievement in shooting. An economist might examine the 'economics of survival'; what size of population is necessary to produce crowds large enough to support a professional club, what is the optimum size of playing staff that a club can afford. Frankenberg, speaking at an A.T.S.S. conference, believes a sociologist, "would immediately wish to discover the distribution of age, sex, social class, ethnic origin and religion of those who played, watched or organised and, in no time at all, would produce a set of punched cards ready to feed through the computer and produce tabulations".

If Frankenberg's words were true then life for the student of sociology would be simple indeed, for his words suggest that sociologists have one distinct way of looking at the social world, one distinct set of concepts and one set of methods for carrying out their research.

Alas, life is not so simple! There is no such thing as THE sociological perspective; there are several. Some, like symbolic interaction, phenomenology and ethnomethodology have become more widely recognised in Britain only recently, and this has given rise to the impression that this pluralism is a fairly recent development. It is our intention in this paper to outline some of the more important perspectives in British sociology, to indicate their founding authors and to show how they have been used to illuminate certain social phenomena.

Until very recently it would have been safe to treat sociology as we have treated the other social sciences. We would probably have said that sociology was the science of society. As recently as 1966, Peter Berger wrote, "The sociologist, then, is someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way. The nature of this discipline is scientific. This means that what the sociologist finds and says about the social phenomena he studies occurs within a rather strictly defined frame of reference."(2) That strictly defined scientific frame of reference determined the way the sociologist looked at society. It produced what was regarded as 'the distinctive sociological perspective' as opposed, for example, to a psychological perspective or a common-sense view of things.

The subject matter, or focus, was society. More precisely, "If you were to insist that the basic problem to which sociology addresses itself be described in a single phrase, we would reply: it seeks to explain the nature of social order and disorder. Sociology shares with all other essentially scientific perspectives the assumption that there is order in nature and that it can be discovered, described and understood . . . sociology seeks to discover, describe and explain the order which characterises the social life of man."(3) This concern with order has been the traditional concern of sociology since its early years and was central to the development of the first distinctive sociological perspective.

Within this 'perspective', however, there were two distinct ways of looking at society and explaining the existence of order. Each produced its own model of society, its own theory or paradigm and, thus, its own perspective. These (perspectives) are called the functionalist and conflict perspectives. In addition there have developed over the past decade in British sociology what have come to be known as the 'new perspectives', 'the phenomenological perspective' or 'the interactionist perspective'. Thus the first problem/task for a student coming to sociology for the first time is to recognise that there are several perspectives within sociology and, secondly, to disentangle the mass of terms associated with each.

All the social sciences have their origins in philosophy but the early philosophers did not distinguish between fields of knowledge. They focused upon any aspect of life that interested them: everything was merely a branch of philosophy. But, as knowledge increased, it became split up into separate fields or subjects. The natural sciences and physical sciences were the first to go. The social sciences only became distinct in the last two centuries; till then they were the province of philosophers. So it is in philosophy that we must seek the origins of the different perspectives within sociology. Philosophers since Aristotle and Plato have been concerned to discover the true nature of man, of society, and of the relationship between the two. It is the relative importance given to 'society' which is the basis of positivism and provides the foundation for the functionalist and conflict perspectives; it is the relative importance given to 'man' which provides the foundation for the interpretive or phenomenological perspectives. To use a crude over-simplification (which we shall modify as we proceed) we might say at this stage that the former perspectives emphasise man as the product of SOCIETY while the latter emphasises society as the product of MAN.

2. Positivism

The first distinctive sociological perspective sprang from the work of Augustus Comte, who coined the word sociology from the Latin 'socius' and the Greek 'logos' in 1837. Comte believed that the scientific discipline of sociology was the result of a natural progression or development of man's thought through three stages. In the first stage, man's thinking was theological or fictitious. In the second stage it was metaphysical or abstract. In the final stage it was scientific or positive. At this third stage all phenomena are looked upon as subject to natural laws that can be investigated by observation and experimentation. Comte believed that the social world is like the natural, physical world. It is made up of objective facts, independent of individuals, just waiting to be discovered. So, for Comte, social life, man and society, should be treated in the same scientific manner as biological organisms. The parts should not be studied on their own but each element should be studied in the light of the whole system, using scientific methods of analysis to produce accurate, quantified data.

When man and society are subjected to this scientific analysis, Comte believed, sociology would become the positive basis of social and political action, providing the basis for reforms. In the period when Comte wrote, the period of social and political upheaval following the French Revolution and the rapid social and economic changes of the industrial revolution, sociologists would be like secular priests bringing a new order to society. They would depend not on divine inspiration but on scientific knowledge, which would be used to predict in order to control. The social order was no longer deemed to be God-given but would be changed and improved by men on the basis of their understanding.

This was Comte's 'positive philosophy' and the essence of positivism. "The name 'positivism' derives from the emphasis on the positive sciences — that is on tested and systematic experience rather than on undisciplined speculation."(4)

So positivism, rather than examining the way individuals perceive the social world around them, assumes that society is an objective thing, 'out there', waiting to be examined, analysed and understood like the natural world.

3. Functionalism

The functionalist perspective is rooted in the work of Emile Durkheim who, like Comte before him, was preoccupied with understanding social order. Functionalism provides a perspective on society as a whole. It views society as an organism in which all the parts function in a way that ensures the continued well-being of the whole organism, like the various systems in the human body or the parts in a watch. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts; society exists in its own right and has a social structure that serves to maintain it.

Funtionalism is inextricably tied up with the question of how order is maintained in society. How do we avoid Hobbes' war of all against all? Order, stability, cohesion and integration are maintained in society by its parts. These parts are social institutions, permanent features of social life like the family and the church, whose existence is 'useful' or functional in some way. The very permanence of such institutions is an index of their 'usefulness'. If they were not functional they would disappear and be replaced, like passing fashions; not all social phenomena are permanent. The people who make up these social institutions, people living in families, for example, may not be conscious of the functions which they and the institutions fulfil but, as a consequence of the institution existing, certain effects follow. No matter what parents may be conscious of doing, children are socialised in families. In this sense, the term 'function' is used rather like it is in mathematics to mean 'consequence'.

Durkheim

Durkheim used the term function in his "Rules of Sociological Method" in 1895. He argues that the sociologist's task was first, to explain the cause of any social phenomenon, like religion, and then to explain the function it fulfils. "We use the word 'function' in preference to 'end' or 'purpose' precisely because social phenomena do not generally exist for the useful results they produce. We must determine whether there is a correspondence between the fact under consideration and the general needs of the social organism . . ."(5)

Social phenomena such as conventions, social rules, beliefs and institutions, like the family, religion, education and law, he regarded as social facts. Following Comte in the positivist tradition it was important for the sociologist to study social facts scientifically as 'things', rather than to study individuals. He practiced what he preached and provided a classic example in his work on suicide. One might imagine that the decision to take ones own life was entirely personal and psychological in character. Without denying these elements, Durkheim showed that suicide rates varied widely with different social conditions. So it, too, was a social fact.

His work was essentially a reaction against the nineteenth century doctrines of individualism, biologism and progressivism. Instead of believing that modern industrial society could be analysed in terms of contractual agreements between individuals motivated by self interest, he stressed the collective aspects of social life. His concept of the collective consciousness stressed the beliefs, ideas and normal patterns of behaviour which were common throughout society. He stressed shared norms and values! But he goes further. The collective conscience is external to individuals, that is, it exists independently of individuals as, for example, when people die or move away. And it constrains them to behave in a certain way, to conform to the norms and values of that society.

Durheim clearly has in mind the stable Roman Catholic societies of Europe up to the nineteenth century. But when a society is in a state of turmoil, or undergoing rapid social change, conditions which typified Europe in the nineteenth century, then the norms and values are no longer so clear cut and unambiguous. Then individuals find themselves faced by moral dilemmas rather than the moral certainty which characterised the cultures Durkheim had in mind.

In our own time, for example, many individuals including highly religious people face uncertainty over the attitude they should adopt towards the use of violence in the pursuit of 'just causes'. Examples abound in the shape of 'guerilla' movements in Africa, the middle east and Northern Ireland, and acts of kidnapping and hijacking.

At a more personal level, people face predicaments over their attitude to speeding in motor cars, advice on contraceptives to schoolchildren, abortion and tax evasion. Such a state of normlessness Durkheim called 'anomie', though he considered it to be a temporary state of affairs which must be replaced by consensus if the society was to survive.

For Durkheim, man is very much the product of society. His work on education provides a good example. In order to reach a satisfactory definition of education he regards it as a social fact and examines it in all societies at all points in time. He concludes that, "Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined."(6) "All education is a continuous effort to impose on the child ways of seeing, feeling and acting which he could not have arrived at spontaneously."(7) "Education consists of a methodical socialisation of the young generation."(8) Education is the moral agent of society, external to the individual and constraining him to conform to collective norms and values. In simple functionalist terms the main function of education is socialisation.

Radcliffe-Brown

The foundations of functionalism laid by Comte and Durkheim were built upon by later writers, particularly the anthropologists, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. Radcliffe-Brown's work emphasised the structural analogy between social life and organisms even more clearly than Durkheim. His work gave rise to the term structural-functionalism. "It is through and by the continuity of the functioning of an organism that the continuity of the structure is preserved. If we consider any recurrent part its function is the part it plays in, the contribution it makes to the life of the organism as a whole."(9)

Parsons

The work of Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown has been further developed by the American sociologist, Talcott Parsons. He begins with the assumptions that the complexity of any society must be based on some sort of systematic organisation and that all societies must share some elements of organisation in common. It is the sociologist's task to identify them.

For society to exist at all man must live as a social animal, i.e. he must interact and co-operate with other men in order to survive, to develop and to progress. No man is an island; Rousseau's noble savage is a fiction of the imagination and anybody who lives the life of a hermit or a recluse today is regarded as an oddity or a deviant. It is the pattern of interaction and co-operation which interests Parsons. He views it as a systematic response to certain basic needs or problems faced by all societies. Thus he begins by looking upon society as a social system which develops sub-systems to resolve these needs or problems. Each sub-system can itself be viewed as a system in its own right with its own sub-systems functioning to maintain it.

All social systems have to resolve two sets of problems, the 'instrumental' problems of achieving certain ends, e.g. survival, and the 'expressive' problems of maintaining efficient co-operation between individuals. These two sets of problems are further refined, for "any social system is subject to four independent functional imperatives or 'problems' which must be met adequately if equilibrium and/or continuing existence of the system is to be maintained".(10) These four 'functional imperatives' or 'problems' are:

Goal attainment
Adaptation
Integration
Latency

Each is resolved by one or more of the system's sub-systems. Goal attainment is concerned with the setting of goals and keeping the system moving towards its goals. Adaptation is concerned with procuring the means to achieve those goals, i.e. adapting the material world to attain certain ends. Integration is concerned with maintaining harmony and solidarity, perhaps in the face of deviance, while latency is concerned with 'tension-management' and stability, perhaps in the face of de-stabilising strains, but usually through activities whose beneficial value is latent, beneath the surface, or not immediately apparent.

As societies become more complex the more likely it is that they will develop some degree of specialisation. This takes the form of a division of labour between individuals and a division of function between sub-systems. So particular institutions or sub-systems are more concerned with particular 'problems'.

If we focus our attention on society as a whole then the sub-system which is most important in resolving the goal attainment problem is the 'polity', the political system or system of government. In Britain it is parliament and cabinet which is responsible for setting goals concerning our survival, standards of living, inflation, health, the redistribution of income, equality of opportunity, and so on. The adaptation function is fulfilled mainly by the economic sub-system, industry, which produces and distributes the means by which we survive, progress, improve our standard of living, etc. The integration function is very largely concerned with the process of socialisation, and with the maintenance of a system of shared norms and values. It is not possible to identify one particular sub-system which fulfills this need. All those institutions concerned with the inculcation of norms and values e.g. the family, religion, education and the media, are regarded as contributing to the resolution of this problem. Latency does not, like the other three imperatives, focus on the needs of the system itself but on the units or individuals of which it is composed. It is concerned with what is latent or potential. Thus anything

which is therapeutic or satisfying in one part of our lives may enable us to achieve our potential in another part. So going on holiday, watching television or doing the garden help sustain us as individuals and in so doing "recharges our batteries" so that we may fulfill our potential as workers, citizens, club members, mothers, etc., in other social systems.

To appreciate the significance of Parsons' work it is important to understand his overall aim and to put it into the context of his work as a whole which spans a period of more than 40 years. He was trying to establish a general theory of action which linked the psychological elements and socially determined elements in human behaviour. As a writer he is usually characterised as a 'diehard functionalist' in the 'worst positivist tradition' because other sociologists focus, as we have, on that particular strand of his work.

Robert Merton refined this analysis when he distinguished between 'manifest' and 'latent' functions. He acknowledged that people are to a great extent conscious and aware of the purpose of many activities. Thus he defined manifest functions as those consequences which are both intended and recognised, and latent functions as those which are neither intended nor recognised. One manifest function of education is learning. As a consequence of attending school from the age of five to sixteen pupils learn things which they did not know before. At the same time the schools are providing a free "baby-sitting" service to parents and increasing the manpower available for employment; these are some of the latent functions of education.

Merton also observed that consequences which are "favourable" or functional for one institution or system may be unfavourable for another, so he developed the concept of dysfunction. Thus bingo may be functional for the firms which organise it commercially and for most of those who attend the sessions and enjoy them, but it may be dysfunctional for some families if it becomes obsessive and leads to conflict and tension.

4. The application of functionalism

Functionalists, then, view society as an integrated, harmonious, cohesive whole where all the parts function to maintain equilibrium and consensus. Thus a functionalist looking at any feature of society would ask what functions that feature performs. What are the functions of the family? of religion? of education? of crime? of stratification? How do they serve to maintain equilibrium and consensus? This is a good example, referred to in our opening paragraphs, of methodology determining the questions which are asked, the kind of knowledge which is produced and the way it is presented.

For example the American sociologist, Kingsley Davis, explained the universality of the family as a form of social organisation in these terms.

The family serves a host of functions including the stable satisfaction of the sex need, the production and rearing of children, socialisation, the provision of recreation, the maintenance of health, the inculcation of religious beliefs, education and the economic function of producing sufficient to provide food, clothes and a home.

But, as society has changed and developed, particularly western society over the past 200 years, some of these functions have been fulfilled by other institutions. The state has taken on much of the responsibility for health and education. Commercial interests and the state (via the B.B.C.) provide entertainment and fill leisure time which would once have been much more the province of the family. Economic functions have clearly shifted from the family, as the basic unit of production in pre-industrial Europe, to capitalist and state organisations. Yet only the family can successfully combine the basic functions of satisfying the sex need, producing and rearing children, and socialisation. In this way, says Davis, the family is functional to all societies, though the form it takes varies from one society to another.

This perspective can be applied to other institutions in exactly the same sort of way. If we take religion for example, a typical American sociology textbook asks explicitly, "What functions do religious institutions fulfil in the life of the community?"(11) In terms of Talcott Parsons' social systems theory and GAIL model its functions are clearly 'expressive' rather than 'instrumental'. Sapir believed the most general function of religion was to help an individual to overcome fear and anxiety and to find peace of mind. Perhaps the function which is most commonly identified by sociologists is that of social control through the propagation and legitimation of values. The maintenance of social order is heavily dependent on a high degree of value consensus and "by adding divine sanction to human values, religion buttresses the norms of society and unites its adherents into a moral community whose members feel a deep common bond because they share a belief in what is morally true."(12) According to Max Weber, if the Protestant revolution had not occurred, the Protestant ethic with its emphasis on salvation through personal strivings and achievement could not have developed. And without the development of these values, capitalism would not have developed either.

Equally, the functionalist perspective can be applied to education. Durkheim, emphasising the relationship between education and society, focuses upon the function of socialisation. Parsons, writing over half a century later, agrees. "From the functional point of view the school class can be treated as an agency of socialisation. That is to say it is an agency through which individual personalities are trained to be motivationally and technically adequate to the performance of adult roles."(13) But he

goes further. In an industrial society education has at least one other important consequence. While on the one hand, it is an agency of socialisation, "on the other hand, it is, from the point of view of the society, an agency of manpower allocation."(14)

If we apply the same perspective to stratification it yields similar results. Stratification or social inequality is both inevitable and functional; it fulfils a societal need. "The main functional necessity explaining the universal presence of stratification is precisely the requirement faced by any society of placing and motivating individuals in the social structure. As a functioning mechanism a society must somehow distribute its members in social positions and induce them to perform the duties of these positions."(15) If all the jobs in society were equally pleasant, equally rewarding, equally important, required equal talent or skill and received the same wage, then it would not matter who got into which job. But this state of affairs obviously does not exist. Some jobs or positions offer more intrinsic satisfaction, demand more skill and more training and, say the functionalists, are more important than others. So how do we ensure that all these jobs are filled in the most efficient manner? In the words of Davis and Moore, it is social inequality which is the "unconsciously evolved device by which societies insure that the most important positions are conscientiously filled by the most qualified persons."(16) And, as we have noted earlier, the education system is actually responsible for the act of differentiating between children and allocating them to these occupational roles.

We could go on applying this perspective to all sorts of phenomena almost indefinitely but we shall restrict ourselves to two brief examples of a slightly different kind, the Queen's Silver Jubilee and deviance. The Jubilee is a good example of secular ritual, and ritual is functional in several ways. It has a cohesive function in so far as it brings people together in a common act and so reinforces their common bonds and social solidarity. In Durkheim's words, "Rites are, above all, means by which the social group reaffirms itself periodically."(17) It has a revitalising function for "if a society is to be kept alive its members must be made keenly aware of their social heritage. Traditions must be perpetuated, faith must be renewed, values must be transmitted and deeply embedded."(18) And it has a euphoric function in so far as it establishes a pleasant feeling of well-being, happiness, satisfaction or contentment. It is easy to apply all these functions to an analysis of the Jubilee.

In the same way we can ask what are the functions of deviance; crime, for example? We might well imagine that criminal activities like robbery, violence or vandalism must be dysfunctional insofar as they threaten social order and harmony. They must surely be disruptive rather than integrative! But, for Durkheim, deviance from norms only serves to

highlight the existence of those norms and to confirm them in the minds of individuals. If nobody broke the existing laws then new standards and laws would emerge. If there were no assault or grievous bodily harm it might well become an offence to swear or to look aggressive! Deviance thus reinforces and sustains the collective consciousness of consensus. The deviants themselves are seen as individuals who have failed to internalise fully the commonly held or 'shared' values of society and are in need of correction.

5. Conflict theory

Whereas functionalism emphasises consensus, shared norms and shared values, and uses concepts like order, harmony, cohesion, integration and equilibrium, conflict theory takes a different view of society. This perspective emphasises differences between interest groups and uses concepts like control, conflict, power, constraint, domination, exploitation, coercion, dissensus and change. Whereas a functionalist perspective offers us a view of society made up of parts, all contributing to the harmonious operation of the whole, a conflict perspective offers us a view of society split into essentially two groups, aggregates, or classes whose interest conflict.

The central theme or thesis of conflict theory is that conflict is inherent in the structure of society. It is an inevitable fact of life. "The notion that wherever there is social life there is conflict may be unpleasant and disturbing. Nevertheless, it is indispensable to our understanding of social problems . . . Not the presence but the absence of conflict is surprising and abnormal, and we have good reason to be suspicious if we find a society or social organisation that displays no evidence of social conflict."(19) Conflict does not necessarily imply violence and bloodshed, of course; it may range from civil war on the one hand to parliamentary debate and letters to a newspaper on the other. In each case, however, we can identify people with differing interests pursuing their own interest.

This indicates a very significant difference from the functionalist or systems perspective. Functionalism reifies society, that is it treats society as something which has an existence in its own right and so has needs of its own. Conflict theory, on the other hand, denies the existence of society as a thing and treats it as being made up of individuals, groups and classes, each with needs, interests and goals of their own.

It was first articulated as a sociological theory by Ralph Dahrendorf in 1958(20). He identified its historical origins in Plato's "Republic" and in the debate between Socrates and Thrasymachus(21).

Marx

Its real foundations, however, must be in the works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the nineteenth century. Marx was one of the most powerful and influential thinkers of that century. So influential was he, in fact, that approximately half the world's population now live under governments described as Marxist. His work draws upon several fields of knowledge and he demonstrated his own intellectual ability in the disciplines of philosophy, history, economics and politics, as well as sociology. Like Comte, Spencer and Durkheim, he could be described as a product of his time for, like them, he wanted to develop "a science of society on the basis of which men could first understand, and then deliberately change and improve the nature of their social order."(22) Like the others, too, "he believed that the efforts to understand the social processes which were afoot, and the political efforts to create such a society required a rigorous scientific study of man and society."(23).

The purpose of such rigorous scientific study was to uncover the invariable laws which governed human activity just as much as they governed the natural world. To this extent his work can be labelled positivist and, according to Bottomore, "Marx considered his own social theory was closer to being a positive science than was Comte's Positivism."(24) However, because we are focussing upon this aspect of Marx's work, which underpins the conflict perspective, we should stress that it is only one strand in his work and not all his writing is positivist. In fact, there are two main strands to his work:

i) man conquering nature, mastering his environment and developing his capacity to control his own destiny, and

ii) man being subjected to forces which he has created but can no longer control.

Marx based his analysis of society on the materialist conception of history. In this view history is not a record of wars, monarchs or great statesmen, but is more a record of how men organise themselves to satisfy their material needs for food, clothing and shelter. "The determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of material life."(25) In other words, the economic system, the way men organise themselves to 'keep body and soul together', to produce, determines their whole way of life. Production involves social relationships. As long as each man is not doing everything for himself there is a division of labour and this will lead to divisions between skilled and unskilled workers, manual and non-manual workers, those who produce and those who provide services, those who give orders and those who do not, those who make decisions and those who do not, and most fundamental, between owners of capital and those with only their labour to sell. These social relations are "the real foundation on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of

social consciousness correspond".(26) Thus for Marx, work is the sub-structure of society, the foundation upon which the superstructure of family type, conjugal roles, religious beliefs, system of government, laws, etc. is built. The sort of work a society undertakes is the mode of production and the way men organise themselves to do it constitutes the relations of production.

This can be illustrated at a very simple level. Imagine that you were one of a dozen people who had been marooned on a desert island or were the sole survivors of some natural disaster. In order to survive you need food but the only food available is a species of nocturnal rabbit. In the first instance your 'Mode of production' will be hunting and, if everybody is required to hunt, your conventional pattern of living by day and sleeping by night must be reversed. Then the way you decide to organise yourselves to catch the rabbits will produce the 'relations of production', who does what. Will everybody fend for themselves, or will there be a division of labour? If so who will do what? Will the best hunters keep all they catch, get the biggest share or will the 'catch' be divided up equally? How will decisions be made? Will the most successful hunters become the leaders or have higher status? Will they develop more power? What will the position of women be? What will the group value most? Will these values be shared by everybody?

The answers to all these questions would describe the relations of production but the answers would, themselves, depend upon the mode of production. That is, they would be different, depending upon whether the group decided to gather food, hunt it, grow it or make things which they would exchange for it.

As the mode of production develops and becomes refined, for example as the division of labour increases, then some categories or classes of people will have more influence, more power and more wealth than others. The self interest of different categories or classes will lead to conflict.

For Marx history could be divided into different periods each of which was characterised by a different mode of production. The main periods were ancient civilisation, feudalism and capitalism, though he sub-divided these even further. In the period of ancient civilisation the dominant mode of production could be described as slavery and the means were slaves. During feudalism the mode was agricultural and the means land; under capitalism the mode is industrial and the means capital, in all its many forms.

The result of applying this view of history, for Marx was to conclude that, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed,

stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight . . .".(27) In any society there are differences of interest stemming from the division of labour and the mode of production. The most fundamental conflict of interest is between those who own the means of production and those who do not. In feudal society the conflict was between those who owned land and those who did not. In capitalist society it is ultimately between owners and non-owners of capital.

Thus, in seeking general laws through which he could understand society and which he could use as a tool for political action, Marx reached several conclusions. Classes exist in all societies. They are aggregates of people (not 'groups' in the usual sociological sense) who share the same relationship to the means of production. In any society there are the 'haves' and the 'have nots', those who own the means of production, land and capital, and those who do not. This fundamental conflict of interest is an inherent part of the structure of any society. In nineteenth century capitalist Britain Marx wrote, "the interests of capital and the interests of wage labour are diametrically opposed."(28) Basically there were only two classes which he designated 'the bourgeoisie' and 'the proletariat'. He recognised that there existed other classes of people like managers, professionals such as accountants, and small shopkeepers but, ultimately, they would recognise where their 'true interest' lay.

Those who owned the means of production, the bourgeoisie, became the ruling class. They had the power to decide what would be produced, where factories would be built and who would be employed. Their economic power became the basis of political power and they made the laws, which would reflect their own interest. But their power goes even further. Marx believed that the ruling class also controlled the ideas, the values, the beliefs and philosophies in society. He wrote, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it."(29)

This is ideology, the notion that the ideas, values and beliefs of a society derive from the dominant class. At the same time they support and reinforce the position of the dominant class by legitimating the status quo, that is by ensuring that the population as a whole accepts the inequalities of wealth and power as being justified and proper. Examples might include laws which frustrated the trades unions in the last century, religious beliefs which make up the Protestant ethic, with its emphasis on salvation through personal strivings, or the education system being thought of as an avenue of social mobility. Elsewhere we see examples

of a ruling class being identified by its colour. So, in South Africa, certain 'cultural' facilities are denied by the ruling whites to other ethnic groups; they contend, for example, that blacks 'are not interested in opera' so a new opera house will be for whites only.

Drawing upon the work of the German philosopher, Georg Hegel, Marx elaborated his view of social change and developed the theory of dialectical materialism. The internal conflicts in society produced not only conflicting social classes but also change from one mode of production to another. Marx was convinced that there was a pattern to these changes, and wrote, "In broad outlines we can designate the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the modern bourgeois methods of production as so many epochs in the progress of the economic formation of society."(30) Using Hegel's process of dialectical change, in which thesis and antithesis produce synthesis, Marx claimed that in any of these 'epochs' one class could be regarded as thesis, the other as antithesis, and the outcome of the conflict between the two as synthesis. Each new synthesis contained the seeds of the next conflict and thus further change. Marx provides few concrete illustrations from earlier 'epochs' but concentrates on feudalism and capitalism. He recognised that it was in the interests of both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat to destroy feudalism but at that point their interest ended and self-interest would lead to conflict. In the early stages those sharing the same class position i.e. the same relation to the means of production, would not recognise their common interest because the ruling class ideology is effective. A 'class in itself' would only become 'a class for itself' as class consciousness developed. This would occur as the development of capitalism created large impersonal factories, like those in Charlie Chaplin's 'Modern Times', which would, in turn, create 'alienation'. A revolution would follow and the new synthesis would be the communist state: "What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable."(31) But until class consciousness develops a person is living in a state of 'false consciousness'.

The revolution which Marx predicted for the capitalist Britain he was examining has not occurred and it is not part of our task to speculate why. Instead we have to recognise that he has contributed to sociological perspectives a view of society which is dynamic rather than static. It is a view in which changes occur as a result of internal conflicts and, if these changes are subjected to empirical research, the pattern of change which emerges allows us to formulate theory or general propositions.

Max Weber

Weber's contribution to conflict theory like Marx before him, represents only one part of an enormous contribution to sociological theory. He is sometimes referred to as "the bourgeois Marx" because so

much of his work is concerned with testing, reassessing or developing Marx's ideas. Like all the other major theorists of class structure Weber began with Marx's formulation of the question. For Weber, however, stratification was much more than economically determined class position, which was itself more complex than Marx had described. His main contribution here is in his elaboration of the Marxian thesis concerning the relationship between the economy and other social institutions, particularly social classes.

Social class was more than just 'relationship to the means of production'. For Weber it was determined by 'market situation'. He begins by accepting that, " 'Property' and 'lack of property' are the basic categories of all class situations." He continues, "Within these categories, however, class situations are further differentiated . . ."(32). There are important distinctions between different kinds of capital or property. A man with a large amount of liquid capital, e.g., cash, is in quite a different position from a man with a small amount of fixed capital e.g., a mine or a factory in a 'remote' geographical position. And there are equally important distinctions between different kinds of labour. There are differences between skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour, for example, but there are also differences within these categories. A mining engineer cannot easily transfer his skills to, say, carpet manufacture. What is important, says Weber, is the kind of capital or labour which is available in relation to the kinds of capital or labour which are being sought in any particular place. In his own words, ". . . the kind of chance in the market is the decisive moment which presents a common condition for the individual's fate. Class situation is, in this sense, ultimately 'market situation'."(33) So, in Weber's analysis there is even more scope for conflict.

His analysis not only refines the idea of classes but the whole concept of stratification. For Weber stratification is more than economically determined social class; it extends to differences in status and power. Status is very much a question of 'the social estimation of honor' and although this may very well be based upon property and wealth, it is not necessarily so. In our own society, for example, a pools winner does not necessarily increase the 'social honor' in which he is held by others, but a priest or clergyman may well have little money and high status. Equally, there are others who, by virtue of their status as, say, 'councillor' or 'professional' or because of particular achievements, may be highly esteemed.

Status groups reinforce their position by developing particular life-styles. Sometimes they sustain their distance and exclusiveness by operating a status disqualification, for example, religion, earning a living through manual labour, or expressing certain political views. In addition, "stratification by status goes hand in hand with a monopolization of ideal and material goods or opportunities in a manner we have come to know

as typical."(33). So, in Britain, one status group maintains its exclusiveness through a particular form of education, prep. school, public school and sometimes Oxbridge. This pattern of education then becomes a 'qualification' for certain occupations.

Ralf Dahrendorf

More recently Ralf Dahrendorf has argued that conflicts occur between those who possess authority and those who do not. It is unlikely to take the form of massive class struggles envisaged by Marx, and so revolution is also unlikely, in highly complex industrial societies like the U.S.A., Britain and Western Europe. Instead, class conflict is likely to occur in a variety of institutions. It may occur in industry between owners or management and workers, in politics between parties, in religion between different faiths or sects, in geographical contexts between regions or in communities between areas. In most cases the conflict will be channelled and institutionalised, in the form of debate or negotiation, but, because of the inter-relationship between institutions, there will be occasions when conflicts become superimposed upon one another. Northern Ireland and Southern Africa must constitute two such examples.

6. Application of Conflict Theory

When this perspective is applied to social phenomena and institutions, as we applied the functionalist perspective earlier, quite different results emerge. The obvious example is stratification. From this perspective social class is the most significant form of stratification, and in any society there will be two fundamentally antagonistic aggregates of people or classes. They are distinguished by economic factors into those who have most of the wealth, power and authority and those who do not. There may well be other 'classes' in between but this fundamental distinction remains a basic difference of interest which will keep the classes separate. It produces differences in life-styles, values and attitudes that have been the subject of much research over the past twenty years (34). Some of these differences have been presented in the form of an 'ideal-type' model by Goldthorpe and Lockwood (35).

WORKING CLASS PERSPECTIVE

General beliefs

The social order is divided into 'us' and 'them': those who do not have authority and those who do.

The division between 'us' and 'them' is virtually fixed, at least from the point of view of one man's life chances.

What happens to you depends a lot on luck; otherwise you have to learn to put up with things.

General values

'We' ought to stick together and get what we can as a group.

You may as well enjoy yourself while you can instead of trying to make yourself 'a cut above the rest'.

Attitudes on more specific issues

(on the best job for a son)

'A trade in his hands.' 'A good steady job.'

(towards people needing social assistance)

'They have been unlucky.'

'They never had a chance.'

'It could happen to any of us.'

(on Trade Unions)

'Trade Unions are the only means workers have of protecting themselves and of improving their standard of living.'

MIDDLE CLASS PERSPECTIVE

General beliefs

The social order is a hierarchy of differentially rewarded positions: a ladder containing many rungs.

It is possible for individuals to move from one level of the hierarchy to another.

Those who have ability and initiative can overcome obstacles and create their own opportunities. Where a man ends up depends on what he makes of himself.

General values

Every man ought to make the most of his own capabilities and be responsible for his own welfare.

You cannot expect to get anywhere in the world if you squander your time and money. 'Getting on' means making sacrifices.

Attitudes on more specific issues

'As good a start as you can give him.' 'A job that leads somewhere.'

'Many of them had the same opportunites as others who have managed well enough.'

'They are a burden on those who are trying to help themselves.'

'Trade Unions have too much power in the country.' 'The Unions put the interests of a section before the interests of the nation as a whole.'

One has here, thus, two sharply contrasting social perspectives, each of which comprises a set of internally consistent beliefs, values and attitudes.

At the same time there is data concerning the distribution of wealth which indicates, for example, that 1% of the population owns 42% of the personal wealth in Great Britain, that 5% owns 75% of the wealth, that 10% owns 83% of the wealth, while 87% of the population owns less than 4% of the personal wealth in the country (36). The stability of these figures, together with the limited amount of social mobility, is taken to indicate the existence of an elite, a ruling class which perpetuates the status quo. It may do this by using methods which range from open confrontation in industrial disputes like that of the power workers during the three-day week, to using the police to control pickets or demonstrators, thus 'upholding the law'. Or it may do so through ideology via church, education and mass media. The more the 'ruling class' becomes conscious of the consequences of its actions the closer we come to the idea of a conspiracy and 'conspiracy theory'.

When this perspective is applied to the study of education it is easy to conclude that the education system serves the interests of an elite in two ways, firstly, through the structure of the system itself and, secondly, through the content and organisation of the curriculum. When examining the structure of the education system in Britain conflict theorists maintain that the private sector is the means by which the elite

educates its children and prepares them for elite status. A public school education may still be sufficient 'qualification' for certain jobs and it is certainly an important avenue to Oxford and Cambridge. Of men entering Oxbridge in the 1960's 54% came from public schools, 16% from direct grant schools and 30% from grammar schools. In turn, Oxbridge is a very important road to certain occupations. "The civil service is . . . very much an Oxbridge — and particularly an Oxford-affair".(37) In addition Sampson has shown that approximately 80% of Church of England bishops, judges and Q.C.'s., directors of the Bank of England and Conservative party cabinet (1966) attended public and direct grant schools (38). The situation was neatly summed up in the Newsom Report when it said, "The public schools are not divisive simply because they are exclusive. An exclusive institution becomes divisive when it arbitrarily confers upon its members advantages and powers over the rest of society." (39)

Conflict theory in addition to providing this analysis of the system of education also lends itself to an analysis of the content of education. The school curriculum has come under close scrutiny in recent years and Michael Young has examined the notion of education as knowledge management. He sees education as an important agent of social control in so far as it is involved in both the creation and transmission of values and in the institutionalisation of knowledge which maintains the social order. Those in positions of power identify certain forms of knowledge as more important than other. Thus for Young 'high status knowledge' is characterised by, "Literacy, or an emphasis on written as opposed to oral presentation; individualism (or avoidance of group work or co-operativeness . . .); abstractness of the knowledge and its structuring and compartmentalising independently of the knowledge of the learner; finally and linked with the former, the unrelatedness of academic curricula, which refers to the extent to which they are 'at odds' with daily life and common experience."(40) According to Althusser(41) education is an Ideological State Apparatus. If 'the ideas of any age are the ideas of the ruling class' then the curriculum and particularly the high status knowledge which dominates it can be regarded as a ruling class view of knowledge. The curriculum is thus a tool of the ruling class, a factor in social control which helps to maintain the status quo, including class dominance.

What counts as valid school knowledge has no relevance in the lives of many pupils but is imposed on them by 'those who know best'. And if those pupils are low achievers they believe themselves to be unintelligent and accept lower paid work as their legitimate reward.

Religion, too, may be analysed from a conflict perspective, using the concept of ideology. For Marx religion was 'the opium of the masses'; it dulled people's senses to the inequalities and rigours of capitalism. Beliefs about salvation and achievement led people to accept

such inequalities and hardship as 'legitimate' and normal. No matter what deprivations people suffered in this life they were led to believe that if they accepted their lot and worked hard they would achieve salvation — in the next world if not in this one. This was the system, the God-given way of things, and few thought of challenging it. It is little wonder then that the Church of England has been referred to as 'the Tory Party at prayer'.

A conflict theorist's view of crime would emphasise the origin of the laws that have been broken and the interests of those who made them. Many laws are concerned with the protection of property but there are those who would say that 'property itself is theft'. A good example is the claiming, registration and exploitation of land in North America which, until settlement by Europeans had been held and used communally by native indian tribes. Another example is the subjection of blacks to the white man's law of apartheid and his direction to designated 'homelands' in South Africa.

Conflict theorists would also point to the different treatment which members of different social classes experience in the administration of law enforcement and justice. A middle class white has a much greater chance of avoiding prosecution in most western societies where the police have legitimate discretion, than a coloured working class youth, for example.

It is when we come to apply the conflict perspective to the family that it becomes clear that this body of theory has not been developed systematically and coherently in the way that functionalism has. Because conflict theory operates mainly at a macro level, with a view of society as a whole, it has rarely focused on social forms or institutions like the family, and very little has been written on this particular topic. Nonetheless, the application is clear.

The family, like education and religion, is an agent of socialisation. In socialising the young the family is, in fact, inculcating the values, beliefs and view of the world which are ideological, that is which represent the ideas, values and beliefs and world view of the ruling or 'middle' class.

At the same time if we look at the works of Marx and Engels (42) then the form of the family to be found in any particular society at a particular point in time will be determined by the mode of production. Whilst we may regard the nuclear family as the most natural thing in the world it is far from being the case; it has developed with industrialisation. In Marxian terms it is part of the superstructure which is determined by the sub-structure of economic activity. Thus in some societies we still find polyandry being practised, in others polygamy, and in every case the form of the family and the mode of production will affect the roles of husbands and wives.

What emerges from a study of these two perspectives is, especially, that each is focussed upon a different question. Functionalism is concerned with the question of *order* whilst conflict theory is concerned with *control*. Each employs its own set of concepts to analyse its own concern. Where functionalism uses harmony, cohesion, integration, system, consensus and equilibrium; conflict theory uses conflict, coercion, domination, power, dissensus and change.

Drawing upon Dahrendorf we can summarise them in the following manner:

Functionalist/Integration Theory	*Conflict/Coercion Theory*
1. Every society is a relatively persistent, stable structure.	1. Every society is, at every point, subject to change.
2. Every society is a well-integrated structure.	2. Every society displays, at every point, dissensus and conflict.
3. Every element in a society has a function i.e. contributes to the maintenance of the social system.	3. Every element in society makes a contribution to social disintegration and change.
4. Every functioning social structure is based on a consensus of its members values.	4. Every society is based on the coercion of some of its members by others.

(43)

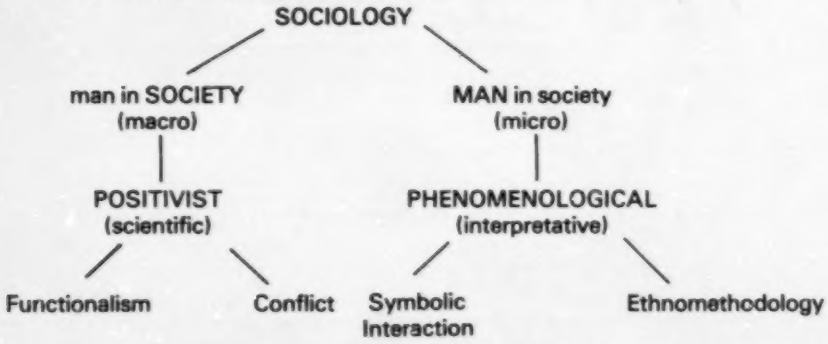
7. Phenomenology

The approaches discussed so far have been concerned with 'macro' sociology, concentrating on the structures of society and trying to show how even so individual and private an action as suicide can be explained by locating it within these social structures and the connections and inter-relations between them. The emphasis has been man in SOCIETY rather than MAN in society. It is this latter emphasis that is now to be considered. Our question is 'How do we create and maintain the society in which we live?' Social facts, rather than being things that should be counted and explained, are seen as *actions that need to be interpreted*. Looking back at Durkheim's work we might ask how reliable are the statistics that he used? Is it not the case that Catholics are more likely than Protestants to regard suicide as shameful and therefore to disguise its incidence? Will all coroners define it and treat it in the same way? Rather than the statistics themselves, it is the method by which they were collected that becomes the focus of interest and this, in turn, suggests alternative interpretations and approaches.

In the past decade there has developed on a large scale an interest in approaches which emphasise the usefulness of a variety of perspectives. Among the perspectives which have emerged are symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and ethnomethodology. We would like to suggest that, for the purposes of this paper and for students coming to the study of sociology for the first time, it is helpful to use phenomenology as the generic or umbrella label and to subsume the other perspectives under it.

Phenomenology is really a school of philosophy which developed in Germany under the inspiration of Edmund Husserl about the time that Mead and the Chicago School (see below) were writing in the United States. When applied by sociologists it has taken many forms. "There is no one phenomenology, rather there are many phenomenologies."(44) "Phenomenologists have differed among themselves on major issues, so that there are different versions of phenomenology."(45)

This allows us to suggest the following framework for considering the variety of sociological perspectives.



We are not suggesting for one moment that these are absolute, discrete and unrelated categories. In this paper for example we have cited Marx's contribution to conflict theory under macro, positivist approaches but his work also contributes to phenomenological perspectives. At the same time some concepts employed by phenomenologists lend themselves to the analysis of macro phenomena. But we believe that such a framework enables students to place particular concepts, theories and authors into some sort of coherent picture.

Although there are differences between them, phenomenological perspectives also share many features in common, not least an anti-positivist stance. "Phenomenological approaches in sociology may be usefully viewed in terms of a reaction against one of the major characteristics of traditional 'mainstream' sociology, namely the positivist methodology that the latter emphasizes."(46)

In addition they also share the following assumptions:

(i) Man actively interprets and constructs his world

(ii) Interpretative (now frequently spelled interpretive) research procedures can supplement quantification and surveys

(iii) Categories that we usually take for granted should be treated as problematic.

Collectively these perspectives have come to be known as the 'interpretative paradigm', so called because it emphasises the way man interprets his world (and, to some extent, the way researchers themselves interpret a subject's actions).

For these phenomenological approaches to have any validity it is of course necessary to assume that men are not mere automatons, to be studied as if they were simply very complex machines. It might be that ants and bees cannot help but do what their instincts demand, what they are 'programmed' to do. Their actions are not to be explained as the result of conscious thought, or of likes and dislikes, but as the operation of instinctual responses that preclude the possibility of choice. Man, on the other hand, is to be thought of as pre-eminently a creature of choice. He is able to think about the future, imagine the consequences of actions and hence to choose to do this rather than that. His actions can only be understood if we appreciate the choices he has made and the consciousness of those choices.

8. Symbolic Interactionism

A man who stops his car because he sees a solid brick wall in front of him is reacting to the physical property of the obstruction. If, on the other hand, he stops his car because he sees a red light or a warning sign, he is responding not to the physical property of the sign, but to the meaning that his society has given to that sign. We are always interacting with our environment and with other people, directly when we fall off a cliff, or bump into someone in the dark, and through the medium of symbols when we write a letter, react to the length of someone's hair or the style of their clothes. The physical and the symbolic are always around us and inextricably mixed together, as when we endow material things such as gold with important human meanings. But as the name implies, that sociological perspective known as symbolic interactionism is concerned primarily with the way that man interacts with his symbolic rather than his physical universe.

Symbolic interactionism is American in origin, its basic ideas being found in the work of such men as William James (1842-1910) John Dewey (1859-1952), Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929), W. I. Thomas (1863-1974), and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931). In different ways and with different emphases they were concerned to assert the importance of the group for understanding the nature not only of human society but also the nature of human beings. Human beings are social creatures, always to be found in groups, and therefore the study of human behaviour should begin with the fact of human association. The individual separate from society is not typical of human beings — solitary confinement and isolation have long been regarded as the most severe of punishments — and society without individuals is meaningless. If therefore we wish to understand either the individual or the society, it must be on the interaction between people that we focus our attention.

Mead, undoubtedly the most influential figure in the development of symbolic interactionism, regarded the existence of society as essential for the "development of the self" in the individual. It is only as the child becomes aware of other people as individuals that he is enabled to think of himself as a person in his own right, so that an important aspect of play to the human child is that of learning the skill of imaginatively being someone else. This empathetic understanding, of knowing what the other feels, not only enables him to understand the actions of others but also enables him to anticipate how they will react to actions of his own. As he becomes more aware of other people and how they think and act, so does he become more aware of himself and of his place in society. It is our membership of a group that gives us our individuality. Becoming a member of society is rather like becoming a member of a team. To behave appropriately as a team member it is not enough to know how to perform your own part thoroughly, you must also have a good understanding of the roles of all the other members of the team, you must be able to anticipate what they are likely to do. An understanding of what is possible for them to do taking into account both the rules of the game and the abilities of the players enables the team member to put his own role in context.

Similarly in society we do not simply react to the gestures that people make towards us, but we interpret them and then select the best response for the occasion. Someone we know waves to us from across the street. Their intention may be to give a friendly greeting, to invite us to stop for a chat, or to insult us. Before we can appropriately respond we must decide what their gesture meant to them, what they intended, as we must try to ensure that the gesture we make in response is understood in the way that we intended: we wish to acknowledge the greeting, but also indicate that we have no time to stop to chat. Our interaction with other people is a series of responses mediated by this self-conscious monitoring process. It is to be contrasted with the way we blink our eyes when something is thrust towards us or the way our leg will jerk if the knee is tapped in the correct place, and it depends upon our being able to put ourselves in the shoes of the other person.

However our responses are never completely predictable. We may intend to make a friendly remark, but the words that come might well be tactless — we become conscious of our actions after they have taken place. In fact it is only then that we might become fully aware of what we intended, as we contemplate what we actually did.

From the interactionist perspective, therefore, the study of society is based on the assumption that human beings make sense of the world through their interaction with other human beings. If we do not eat then we will die, that is a fact of our existence, of the chemistry of our bodies. But what we choose to eat, what we define as food is the result of our participation in a society and we may die rather than eat something that

nutritionally is perfectly adequate food. Despite our involvement in the Common Market many English people find it difficult to think of snails as a delicacy to be eaten. We act towards things on the basis of the meanings that things have for us and not simply on the physical properties of those things. But although those meanings are created by the interaction of members of our society, they are not the same for us all. We interpret the situations in which we find ourselves on the basis of our past experience, and in this respect every individual is unique. Consequently meanings change as new interpretations are reflected back to us from the reponse of others and from our perceptions of our own actions as we live in the world.

The interactionist perspective, therefore, seeks to explain a situation taking into account the actors' definition of it; behaviour becomes explicable when it is understood from the point of view of the actor.

Unfortunately there is no simple way of discovering the point of view of the actor. M. H. Kuhn, who worked at the University of Iowa from 1946 until his death in 1963, approached the problem by developing questionnaires and attitude scales on the principle that the best way to find out what someone thinks of themselves is to ask them. His most famous test, variously known as the T.S.T. (twenty statements test) or the W.A.I. (who am I?) consists of asking the subject to write down twenty statements in answer to the question 'Who am I?' — without spending too much time thinking about it. The results are then subjected to various statistical techniques and hence the self concepts of various groups can be established. However this approach is more in accord with the techniques of traditional mainstream sociology; its ultimate aim is to derive scientific laws that will explain the facts that research has accumulated, and which will enable the social scientist to predict and so to control. It is in the positivist tradition, modelled on the methods of the natural scientist. But as has long been recognised there are important differences between studying the properties of metals and the properties of societies. With metals the problem is one of the isolation of variables, and of accurate measurement; the scientist does not have to consider what attitude the metal takes to his experiment, whether it minds being heated up for example. But this is precisely what the social scientist does have to consider. The work of the linguist Labov provides a good illustration. He demonstrated that attempts to measure the speech of children were crucially affected by the nature of the testing situation. A black child given a language test — such as being asked to identify and describe a toy aeroplane — by a white coated doctor in the clinical environment of a hospital or university might well refuse to speak at all. But this should not be taken to mean that he cannot express himself in language — as Labov was able to show by getting a black interviewer to talk to the child in a park near his home. Clearly the results of any pencil and paper test must be affected by the attitudes of the people being

tested to the fact of their being tested, who is testing them, and where the test is taking place. Tests produce quantifiable data, but at the expense of simplifying complex situations.

In fact the bulk of work that is clearly influenced by the symbolic interactionists lies outside this mainstream of American sociology, and has been particularly associated with the University of Chicago, where Mead himself was a Professor of Philosophy, and where his work was carried on and developed by H.G. Blumer. The Chicago school, in contrast to pencil and paper tests and questionnaire techniques, laid great stress on the use of observational procedures such as interviews (particularly of the open-ended or non-directive type where the respondent is encouraged to talk rather than simply answer set questions), autobiographies, case studies and, pre-eminently, participant observation.

For this to be successful it is necessary for the sociologist to engage in a task not dissimilar to translating from a foreign language. He must be sufficiently familiar with the group he is studying to make sense of their behaviour, or rather to understand what their behaviour means to them, and he must then find a means of making these discoveries intelligible to people who have a different perspective. The language of academic journals and text books of sociology is far removed from that of say a Glasgow street corner gang. To understand what it is like to be a member of such a gang, to find out what they do and what their activities mean to them, and then to explain it all in academic English without losing the essential flavour of the experience requires a considerable literary as well as sociological talent. Our understanding of minority groups and deviants has been profoundly affected by studies attempting this task of interpretative understanding, and it is in these ethnographic studies that the close relationship of sociology and anthropology can most easily be seen. Perhaps the most vivid writer in this tradition is Erving Goffman, who is virtually a school on his own. Goffman is associated with what has been called the 'dramaturgical approach' to the study of interaction. Social encounters are described in theatrical terms — the people involved are following scripts, they know what are appropriate things to say to the doctor when he says 'How are you?' just as they will be part of a different play when a friend asks them the same question on the street. Goffman is an acute observer of all these encounters and his descriptions of how people cope with shame — how do you face your friends immediately after being reprimanded by the teacher? — and of how people generally present themselves in public are always interesting and insightful. In latter years however he has been more concerned to provide us with concepts for analysing social encounters than to provide us with analyses of actual situations.

9. Phenomenology and Ethnomethodology

Sitting in a darkened theatre watching the actors on stage, it is easy to become immersed in the action of the play, to forget that it is not 'real life'. At the cinema we may similarly so identify with the action on the screen, that we may feel fear, laugh out loud or even cry; only afterwards do we say "It was only a film!" Even in the familiar surroundings of our own home, in the company of our family, the pictures produced on a small screen can so engage out attention that we begin to believe in the reality of the characters — to be concerned about what happens to them, to have hopes and fears for their future. A popular series, such as Coronation Street, clearly involves many people in just this way.

How is this illusion created? What must the playwright, actor, producer, cameraman do in order that we will forget that the words spoken are learned, not spontaneous, that the actions are rehearsed and that we are looking at pictures not life?

Confronted by a poor play or bad acting it is easy for us to become aware of these things. If an actor forgets his lines or a fight is clumsily staged the illusion is shattered and we see the play for what it really is — not real life but a pretence. The theatre critic is one who, while watching the drama must retain his awareness of the part played by the script the techniques of the actor and the understanding of the producer, in creating the play before him. He tries to reduce what he sees on the stage, the object of his consciousness, to the phenomena out of which it is constituted — script, acting etc. — and then to appraise the importance of each part. Is it a good play ruined by bad acting? A good play, good actors, but badly produced? And so on.

Perhaps we can analyse real life in a not dissimilar way. We tend to take the world around us for granted. We are not constantly amazed that water is available at the turn of a tap, that buses arrive at predictable times nor that the shops sell the things that we need. We have the 'illusion' that these things are normal, and it is only at times of crisis, when for some reason or other they fail to materialise that we become aware that the world we live in doesn't just exist independently of us, but that we have also created it. This is quite obvious if we think of a town or city, but it is important to remember that we have also created a sea that contains much more oil and far fewer whales, a landscape from which trees have been removed, and deserts created and forests planted. We have played a significant part in the distribution of the wild life of the world and, in addition, have created new animals of our own, such as toy dogs and cows that produce enormous quantities of milk. Without our active intervention and control the world would soon become a very different place as all gardeners are painfully aware. As we go about our daily business we are in interaction with other people and with the material world around us, and just as the people we meet affect and

change us so do we affect and change them; while at the same time we may well be burning petrol or using paper which in turn means that oil has been extracted from the earth and that trees have been cut down. The world is always a different place.

But what is it really like? Always we have the phenomena of the world — the objects that we can see, that we are conscious of — and the illusion that they are as they appear, that they could not be otherwise. But familiar objects seen in unfamiliar surroundings look strange to us — we see features of them that we never noticed before. And in fact we can often make familiar objects appear strange by looking at them critically, or by imagining how they might appear to someone else, and perhaps thereby gaining a fuller understanding of what they are really like — of what constitutes the phenomena.

This is the project of the phenomenologist. For the interactionist, society cannot be studied separately from the individuals who comprise it, neither can the individuals be understood without reference to society, for it is the interaction of people that produces both the group and the awareness of self in the individuals. In a rather analogous way the phenomenologists argued that we can never perceive reality without first filtering it through our consciousness. Consciousness is always consciousness of something, we cannot separate the object from our awareness of it. What we can do is try to describe the various phenomena that make up the object; to reduce the object of consciousness to the phenomena out of which it is constituted.

For instance we are aware that there are rules that govern our behaviour, but many of them are hidden from our notice by virtue of the fact they are so familiar to us. The problem for the sociologist is that if it is not always apparent to the people concerned what the rules are that govern their behaviour, how is it possible for him to discover them? A well known technique used by sociologists influenced by the phenomenological perspective is to study the reactions of people in what they consider to be a familiar situation when in fact it is not. The researcher returns to his parents' home but instead of behaving as usual on such visits he behaves as he does when lodging in a stranger's house. He then studies the reaction of his parents to his behaviour. From the point of view of the parents, initially at least the situation is a familiar one, but it then gradually becomes one of crisis as their 'normal' rules of conduct in the familiar situation of child returning home are found not to work. It is rather like an experienced cook preparing a familiar dish, the recipe for which was memorized long ago. It has always worked before, but now inexplicably it repeatedly fails. At first she ignores the failure expecting success next time, but as her expectations are repeatedly frustrated she will check the ingredients carefully, re-read the recipe, make sure the oven is operating correctly and so on. The things that before she did as a routine she now does consciously, what was

previously assumed is now checked. Our researcher, himself the faulty ingredient, observes and records and hopefully discovers the rules previously assumed by his parents and of course himself as well.

There are two rather different emphases that might be distinguished here. On the one hand there is the concern to understand how the social world became as it is — how was it created. How does it happen that parents have expectations their children will behave in certain ways? How does it happen that in one society it is customary to queue and in others it is not? Clearly these customs change over time, they are built up with use, and so we may ask how was the social world constructed, by what processes do we sustain it?

On the other hand we might choose to focus our attention more narrowly on the rules that govern our behaviour. We might ask what are the rules that parents expect their children to observe? How is queueing done in various societies? This latter approach might be thought of as producing the perfect handbook for a spy as it focuses on the everyday routines of social life, explaining how people greet each other, open telephone conversations, take their turn in shops and so on. It is often regarded as a distinct branch of sociology and by some as not sociology at all, but as a quite separate enterprise. Garfinkel, trying to uncover the rules whereby juries come to decisions, coined the term ethnomethodology to explain what he was about — studying the methods of conducting everyday life.

In fact ethnomethodology is often regarded as a branch of symbolic interactionism and the two might be thought of as the 'micro' complement to functionalism because their emphasis on the small group and the interaction of individuals tends to ignore and perhaps thereby take for granted, the wider social context in which the action takes place. Critics point to the fact that most of the writing in this tradition relates to minority, deviant, and relatively powerless people. The sociologist is seen as an undercover agent from the dominant groups, who penetrates the world of the oppressed and brings back information about their habits, thoughts and organisations, and thus enables the oppressor to take appropriate action.

Possibly phenomenological approaches are less susceptible to this criticism, in that their basic stance is to 'make problems' rather than to 'take problems', to locate that which is taken for granted and to explore the reasons why it is so. There is much in this perspective therefore to appeal to those who are dissatisfied with things as they are: for conflict theorists who need to explain why the apparent injustices of society are not perceived more clearly by the individuals concerned — the problems of 'false consciousness' — for instance.

However, having tried to draw some distinctions between interpretative approaches, it is important to stress again that there are

many inter-relationships, with the perspectives being complementary rather than discrete.

10. Application of Phenomenological Perspectives

The early 1970's saw a distinct shift in emphasis in the sociology of education from the macro level of analysis to the micro, and with it an increasing emphasis on interpretative approaches. Indeed it has become customary to refer to the 'new sociology of education' when referring to the work of such people as M.F.D. Young who edited the very influential reader "Knowledge and Control", and this orientation is also reflected in the Open University course "School and Society". Schools, and particularly classrooms, provide excellent laboratories for the application of the techniques favoured by symbolic interactionists and several such pieces of research have been reported in the last few years.

Whereas positivist researchers, and particularly those working within a functionalist perspective, have TAKEN educators' problems as given, more recent researchers working within an interpretive framework have MADE their problems by questioning the categories which the positivists have begun to take for granted. So they question what we understand by 'underachievement', 'failure', 'deprivation', etc. They ask, for example, 'What are pupils failing at? What counts as educational knowledge? What do we understand by schooling?'.

When we ask questions like this it may lead to a radical reappraisal of certain actions and policies. Bernstein has suggested, for example, that the concept of compensatory education and related ideas about working class pupils' underachievement is misleading because it focuses attention almost exclusively on what are claimed to be deficiencies in the child and his family. It "serves to direct attention away from the internal organisation and the educational content of the school."(47)

Howard Becker is an American sociologist who has not concerned himself directly with schools but has conducted research with medical students. His work illustrates clearly how the phenomenon of medical school appears to the participants, the students and the tutors. The student group develops its own culture, which in this context is defined differently from the anthropological definition of 'life style', which is used by macro theorists. Culture in this context is the set of shared understandings which emerges as the students face a common problem (of becoming doctors) and define their situation in a way which is meaningful to them rather than accepting their tutors' definitions. In effect this means that the students define their clinical work as most important and they arrange their priorities accordingly. Fred Davis used a similar phenomenological approach to study the socialisation of nurses. He observed the subjective process whereby student nurses moved from their original definition of their role to a professionally approved definition.

When this approach is applied to education, we might ask how pupils define their situation, what subjective meanings they bring to school with them and what meaning school has for them. In addition we might examine the assumption, so frequently taken for granted, that pupils and teachers share the same meanings. Hargreaves' work at Lumley indicates that, for the 'delinquescent' or anti-school pupil subculture at least, pupils and teachers define the situation differently.

Once we start to question taken for granted assumptions we are led to a reconsideration of what counts as school knowledge, achievement, ability and failure. Cicourel and Kitsuse examined the way students came to be classified as college-going or underachieving, particularly by councellors who had a significant effect on a student's career. Social class influenced the way teachers and counsellors processed and channelled students into particular courses. Middle and upper-income students were more likely to be put into college-preparatory courses than lower income students with similar academic records. In Britain, Nell Keddie's study 'Classroon Knowledge', concludes that, "ability is an organising and unexamined concept for teachers whose categorisation of pupils on the grounds of ability derives largely from social class judgements of pupils' social, moral and intellectual behaviour."(48)

In this field, David Hargreaves is one of the better known figures and his work serves also to link education with the study of deviance in society, through labelling theory. Labelling theory has developed from the suggestion that the focus of study in deviance should 'shift from an exclusive concern with the deviant individual to a major concern with the process by which the deviant label is applied.' Hargreaves and his collaborators have used participant observation in the classroom to record and examine the sequence of events that culminates in the deviant label being applied to certain pupils and the acceptance by the pupils of that label. By examining the practices of teachers and pupils it is hoped that classroom behaviour will be better understood, seeing it as the product of interaction rather than as the problem of personality.

The application of this paradigm to the 'problem' of crime and delinquency leads researchers to ask quite different sorts of questions. More traditional researchers would ask:

Who is deviant?
How did he become deviant?
What areas or conditions produce most delinquents?
How can they be cured or controlled?

The phenomenologist would probably ask:

Under what circumstances does a person become set apart and defined as deviant?

How is he cast in that role?
How do others respond to him when he is so defined?
How does he respond to this definition?
How does such labelling affect his self-concept?

The functionalist approach viewed crime as deviance from established norms. Crime was explained in terms of the individual's failure to internalise those norms during socialisation. It is a failure of socialisation and leads to prescriptions of punishment and 'cure'. The conflict theorist might relate crime to deprivation and alienation which results from urban dereliction and neglect by the 'establishment', which chooses to invest in new office blocks and commercial ventures (and even cathedrals in some cities). The real vandals are seen as the investors, the planners and demolition men who break up the old communities. As a result of such a situation, Laurie Taylor has suggested that "kids fall into trouble like ducklings into water".

In contrast, phenomenological perspectives examine the way situations appear to the delinquents themselves, that is the process by which they define, interpret and put constructions on their situation. Clearly, labelling and the definitions of others are significant here.

Applied to the family the interpretative approach similarly involves trying to achieve an understanding of process, of how the members of the family interact and the significance of their interactions for each other, Peter Berger & Hansfield Kellner produced a paper "Marriage and the construction of reality" which illustrates this well and which also indicates the need to interpret statistics, rather than to let the 'facts speak for themselves'. They suggest that the commonly held assumption that rising divorce rates indicate a decline in the importance of marriage is wrong. Rather they claim that the fact that many of the divorced remarry indicates that marriage is so important that couples have a lack of toierance 'for the less than completely successful marital arrangement they have contracted with the particular individual in question . . . the frequency of divorce simply reflects the difficulty and demanding character of the whole undertaking'.

The practice of social work has been much affected by work in this tradition, tending to deflect attention away from the individual and to focus instead onto the family as a unit, and increasingly to locate that family in the community of which it is a part.

11. Conclusion

What then are we to make of this variety of perspectives? Does one invalidate all the others? Is there one which is 'better' than the others? Not necessarily. We believe that each perspective offers insights which illuminate each 'problem' to some degree but, as yet, no one form of theorising has overtaken all the others. "We need to constantly remind

ourselves that all an approach like Marxism, or interactionism, or functionalism or ethno-methodology can do is to strike a more or less complex balance about the priority of individual or society . . . It is possible to plump for one type or level of explanation as basic and to see the rest as derivative. But society's (and sociology's!) existence depends upon there being reciprocal relationships between these levels."(49)

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